Votes Into Power

How electoral rules shape campaigns and representation

SS24.USG.11 "Analyze the electoral process, focusing on election laws and systems at the national, state, and local levels, and explain their constitutional underpinnings, practical implementation..."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline rules that shape electoral votes or House seats, circle choices made by campaigns or mapmakers, and number two effects of those choices on voter attention or representation.

Two Routes to Power

1. On election night, a candidate can win the national popular vote yet lose the presidency. The Constitution creates a system in which states appoint electors, and the Twenty-Third Amendment gives Washington, D.C., electors too. Today, voters choose slates of electors pledged to candidates under state election rules. There are 538 electoral votes, and a candidate needs at least 270 to win. Each state's allotment equals its seats in Congress: two senators plus its representatives. Most states give all their electoral votes to the statewide winner. Maine and Nebraska instead award two statewide and one for each congressional district.

2. Imagine a campaign with strong support in one populous state but narrow losses in several others. Under winner-take-all rules, extra votes beyond victory in that first state bring no additional electoral votes there. A rival might build a winning coalition by appealing to voters in states with different economies, populations, and concerns. Campaigns therefore weigh where persuasion or turnout might change a state's outcome, not just where they can add votes nationwide. This strategy can concentrate campaign visits in competitive states, while voters in states with predictable outcomes receive less attention.

3. After each census, the 435 House seats are reapportioned among states according to population. The Constitution requires a count every ten years and apportions House seats by population; federal law fixes today's House at 435 voting members. States then redraw congressional districts as populations shift. A district's boundaries can affect whose votes translate into House seats. If lawmakers pack one party's voters into a few districts or split them across many districts, gerrymandering may give that party fewer seats than its overall support suggests. For every state, a change in its House seats also changes its electoral vote total, reshaping candidates' paths to 270.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Why can a candidate win the national popular vote but lose the presidency? Explain using the rule followed by most states.

2. Why might a campaign appeal to voters in several states with different concerns? Explain one possible effect of that strategy on voter attention.

3. How do reapportionment and redistricting differ, and how can reapportionment affect a presidential election?

4. How could packing one party's voters into a few districts change its House representation without changing its overall support?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

A fictional state gains a seventh House seat after having six; a proposed district map packs most supporters of one party into two districts. In 60 to 85 words, explain the change in electoral votes, a possible effect of the map on House representation, and how a presidential campaign might adjust its coalition strategy, while distinguishing possible effects from guaranteed outcomes.

ANSWER KEY

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PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline rules that shape electoral votes or House seats, circle choices made by campaigns or mapmakers, and number two effects of those choices on voter attention or representation. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Why can a candidate win the national popular vote but lose the presidency? Explain using the rule followed by most states.	**Most states award all their electoral votes to the statewide winner. A candidate can receive many votes nationwide but lose enough states that another candidate reaches 270 electoral votes.**
2	Why might a campaign appeal to voters in several states with different concerns? Explain one possible effect of that strategy on voter attention.	**Winning a coalition of states can provide the electoral votes needed to reach 270. Focusing on competitive states may leave voters in states with predictable outcomes with fewer campaign visits.**
3	How do reapportionment and redistricting differ, and how can reapportionment affect a presidential election?	**Reapportionment divides House seats among states after a census; redistricting redraws districts within states. A change in a state's House seats changes its electoral vote total.**
4	How could packing one party's voters into a few districts change its House representation without changing its overall support?	**The party could win those few districts by large margins but win fewer seats elsewhere, leaving it with fewer House seats than its overall support suggests.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The state's electoral votes rise from eight to nine because it now has seven House members and two senators. Packing one party's supporters into two districts could limit its chances in the other five, so its share of House seats might fall short of its statewide support. That result is not guaranteed, since turnout and voting patterns matter. If the state is competitive, a presidential campaign might spend more time there to seek its nine electoral votes.

Accept other plausible campaign responses that connect the added electoral vote to a coalition strategy. Responses should treat the map's effect on House seats as possible, not certain.